

A two-tiered change in Canadian English: The emergence of a streamlined evidential system

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Five different complementizers, shown in (1), can link a perception verb to a finite subordinate clause in Canadian English:

(1) It seems (*like/as if/as though/that/Ø*) she's getting better quickly.

The most prevalent variant in Canada is *like* (López-Couso and Méndez-Naya 2012) - an incoming form that now represents 68.2% of the complementizers across multiple corpora of sociolinguistic interviews from Ontario (Tagliamonte 2001-2003, 2006; 2003-2006, 2010-2013, 2014; Tagliamonte and Denis 2014). The alternatives are low-frequency in vernacular corpora, particularly *as if* and *as though* (López-Couso and Méndez-Naya 2012; author 2011, 2014).

A related, broader change is also occurring in Ontario (author, 2015). This entire finite subordinate structure - mostly with *like* - is taking over from infinitival subordination in apparent time. In other words, (2b) is now catching on at the expense of (2a).

(2a) She seems to be getting better quickly.

(2b) (It/she) seems like she's getting better quickly.

Is this secondary level of change a consequence of *like* having overtaken the competing complementizers? To probe this issue, I compare the Canadian results to a methodologically comparable corpus from the city of York, England (Tagliamonte 1996-98, 1998), since the change toward *like* is lagging behind in the United Kingdom (López-Couso and Méndez-Naya 2012). Indeed, I find that *like* is low-frequency in York (13.2%) and that there is no evidence of a change from (2a) to (2b) occurring there. This is consistent with the notion that this broader level of change will begin only beyond a certain threshold of *like* among the complementizers.

Assuming that this is the case, I propose that the reason has to do with the syntactic and semantic properties of *like*. Because *like* permits optional copy-raising (Rogers 1974, Horn 1981, Asudeh 2002, *inter alia*), there are always two choices in terms of the matrix subject: an expletive as in (3a) or a (copy-raised) noun phrase as in (3b).

(3a) It seems like she's getting better quickly.

(3b) She seems like she's getting better quickly.

Acquisition studies (Rett et al. 2013; Rett and Hyams 2014) suggests that what conditions the variation between (3a) and (3b) is evidential value. With an expletive as in (3a), the speaker is not committing to any particular source or reliability of the information in the subordinate clause; however, the copy-raised structure with the matrix NP in (3b) is unequivocally marked for *direct* evidentiality, indicating direct perception of that NP as the information source (Rett et al. 2013; Rett and Hyams 2014).

With *like* as the dominant variant, there is a one-to-one mapping between subject type and evidential status. This was not previously the case: some of the declining complementizers block copy-raising entirely (Huddleston and Pullum 2002:962, Gisborne 2010:275), suggesting that a matrix expletive would sometimes have been ambiguous in terms of evidential value. With *like*, there is a newly straightforward binary evidential distinction. The declining infinitival structure in (2a) does not fit into the reorganized system and has no other advantages over the finite construction. This, I argue, accounts for the loss of (2a) in Ontario English.

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